



### TALKING POINTS: Deaths in Children from Influenza Complications

- Influenza-related deaths in children are tragic.
- 10 child deaths from laboratory confirmed influenza-related complications have been officially reported so far during the 2007-08 flu season
- Nine of these deaths occurred from January 1 – February 2, 2008. This increase in reports of deaths among children coincides with an increase in flu activity in the country.
- Because of confidentiality issues, CDC does not discuss or give details on individual cases.
- These deaths are a somber reminder of the importance of protecting children from the flu – especially those at high risk from serious flu-related complications. Importantly, children who have not been previously vaccinated need to get two doses of influenza vaccine in order to be protected.
- Tragically, every year in the United States, some children die of complications from influenza infection. During the past 4 years that CDC has tracked deaths among children with influenza infections, the number of deaths reported to CDC each year has ranged from 44 to 153 deaths.
- Children at highest risk from flu complications include:
  - Children younger than 5 years old, including children younger than 6 months of age who are too young to be vaccinated.
  - Children (of any age) with chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart disease.
- Vaccination remains the best method for preventing influenza and its potentially severe complications in children and adults even in years where there is a suboptimal match between vaccine and circulating strains of influenza viruses. For more information, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/vaccineeffect.htm>.
- At this time, vaccination efforts should continue to occur.
  - CDC recommends vaccination for children 6 months through 5 years of age, and household members and others in close contact with children younger than 5 years old, especially contacts and caregivers of children younger than 6 months old.
- **The "flu shot"**— an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

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- **The nasal-spray flu vaccine** — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for “live attenuated influenza vaccine” or FluMist®). LAIV (FluMist®) is approved for use in healthy\* people 2-49 years of age† who are not pregnant. For more information, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>
- Ensure that children aged 6 months through 8 years of age who are receiving the flu shot for the first time receive two doses of vaccine, with the doses given at least one month apart. For children younger than 9 years old, who have been recommended to receive two doses, but who have not gotten the second dose, a single dose of vaccine may provide little clinical benefit.
  - Children who only received one dose of vaccine in their first year of vaccination should still receive two doses in the following year.
  - The flu shot may be used for any person aged 6 months and older, including those with high-risk conditions.
- CDC also recommends that healthy children aged 2-8 years who are receiving the nasal spray flu vaccine for the first time receive two doses of vaccine at least 4 weeks apart.
  - Children who received only one dose in their first year of vaccination should receive two doses in the following year.
- Vaccination providers should ask the parents or guardians of children about wheezing and should not use nasal spray flu vaccine on children who have wheezing in the past year or who have asthma.
- It also is important to remember that the flu vaccine is not perfect – and every year some vaccinated people still get sick from influenza. So, multiple strategies should be used at the same time to reduce, as much as possible, the risk of influenza and its complications, including:
  - The appropriate use of influenza antiviral medications
  - Hand hygiene and cough etiquette (washing your hands often and covering coughs and sneezes)
  - Stay home from work and/or school when you are sick to avoid spreading your illness to others.
- Flu antiviral drugs are an important second line of defense against influenza and can be used to treat flu and to prevent flu.
  - Early treatment of high-risk adults infected with the flu has been shown to reduce the risk of death, but less information is available for children. Regardless, early antiviral treatment of high-risk children or any child who is moderately or severely ill with the flu may help. Unfortunately, no influenza antiviral medications are FDA-approved for children less than 1 year old. Parents should consult with their doctor about the use of antiviral medications if they think their child may have flu.
  - Antiviral medications can also be used to prevent the flu. Providers may consider giving antivirals to a person who may not respond to the flu vaccine because they have a severely weakened immune system or because they were exposed to someone else with flu illness, are unvaccinated, or may not be adequately protected after vaccination, and are at higher risk of complications.

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- Flu-related deaths in children less than 18 years old should be reported through the Nationally Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (NNDSS). The number of flu-associated deaths among children reported during the 2007-08 flu season will be updated each week and can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly>.
- Reporting of laboratory confirmed flu deaths in children was initiated during the 2003-04 season,
  - During the 2006-07 flu season, a total of 74 influenza-related deaths in children were reported to CDC.
  - During the 2005-06 Season, 44 deaths in children under age 18 were reported to CDC
  - During the 2004-05 Season, 48 deaths in children under age 18 were reported to CDC.
  - During the 2003-04 Season (the first year that CDC collected information on pediatric flu deaths), 153 flu-associated deaths in children under age 18 were reported to CDC.
- More flu-related deaths will likely occur this winter among children; however, at this time, neither childhood deaths nor hospitalizations exceed what we have seen in recent prior years for this point in the season. Meanwhile, CDC will continue to monitor and investigate all reported influenza-related deaths among children.

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu), or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).